Fertility Awareness–Based Methods

Fertility awareness means *a woman learns to know when the fertilities of her menstrual cycle starts and when it ends*. With this knowledge, the couple can avoid pregnancy. This method is moderately effective. Main advantage is no physical side effects. A woman can use several ways to tell when her fertile time begins and ends.

1. **Calendar method**
   Calender days can be used to identify the start and end of the fertile time (the fertile time is the time when she can become pregnant if coitus occurs).

2. **Cervical secretions**
   When a woman sees or feels cervical secretions, she may be fertile. It can be just a sense of vaginal warmness.

3. **Basal body temperature**
   A woman's resting body temperature goes up slightly around the time of ovulation (release of gaff). Then she could become pregnant.

4. **Feel of cervix**
   As the fertile time begins, the opening of the cervix feels softer, opens slightly and is moist. When she is not fertile the opening is firmer and closed.

Scanned with ACE Scanner

A woman may use one of the following or combinations of the following to tell when the fertile time starts.

1. **Calendar (rhythm) method (safe period)**: Before relying on this method, the woman records the number of days in each menstrual cycle for at least 6 months. The first day of menstrual bleeding is counted as day one.

   (Ovulation usually occurs from 12 to 16 days before the onset of menstruation.)

   Subtract 18 from the length of the shortest recorded cycle. This gives the estimated first day of the fertile period.

   Then subtract 11 days from the length of the longest recorded cycle. This gives the last day of the fertile time.

   The couple avoids sex or uses condom during the fertile time.
   E.g., if the recorded cycles varies from 26–32 days.
   26 – 18 = 8 (avoid unprotected sex from day 8th)
   32 – 11 = 21 (okay to have unprotected sex again after day 21 onwards)

   The period between 8th day to 21st day of the cycle is fertile period. So sex must be avoided from day 8th to day 21st of the cycle (14 days)

First seven days and last seven days of the menstrual cycle is the safe period.

The calendar method may require 16 days or more in a row of avoiding sex in each cycle. This problem is more in woman with irregular cycles.

2. **Cervical secretions to identify start and end of the fertile time**
   a) The woman checks every day for any cervical secretions. She may feel wetness at the opening of vagina or secretions on the finger, underpants, blotting paper etc. As soon as she notices any secretions, the couple should avoid sex or use a barrier method.
   b) The secretions have a peak day, when they are most slippery, stretchy and wet. The couple continues to avoid sex or uses a barrier method for four days after the peak day.

Scanned with ACE Scanner

c) In a few days, the secretions become sticky, pasty or crumbly and then no secretions at all. The couple can then have unprotected sex until menstrual bleeding begins again.
d) After menstrual bleeding stops the woman may have several days with no secretions. Sex is usually considered safe during this time.

3. **Basal body temperature (BBT) to identify end of fertile time**
a) The woman must take her body temperature in the same way either orally, rectally or vaginally at the same time each morning before she gets out of the bed. She must know how to read a thermometer and record the temperature on a special graph paper.
b) The woman's temperature raises 0.2°C to 0.5°C (0.4°F to 1°F) around the time of ovulation.
c) The couple should avoid sex or use a barrier method from the first day of menstrual bleeding till the day the woman's temperature is raised above her regular temperature and (i.e., for three full days). This means the ovulation has occured and passed.
d) After this period, couple can have unprotected sex until her next menstrual bleeding period begins.

Effectiveness: Somewhat effective; 20 pregnancies per 100 women year.

4. **Cervical secretions and Basal body temperature**
Uses identify fertile and infertile days by combining BBT and cervical secretion observation.
a) The couple starts avoiding unprotected sex when the woman senses cervical secretion. The couple keeps avoiding unprotected on the 4th day after peak cervical secretions and the third full day after the rise in temperature.
b) Other signs and symptoms of ovulation are: abdominal pain, cervical changes, and breast tenderness.

Scanned with ACE Scanner